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ABSTRACT

In April 1975, a survey of community attitudes toward migrants was conducted in a small Indiana town in Henry County (population 450). A random sample of 19 males and 16 females, ranging in age from 20 to 60, reacted to a specially constructed 12 item Likert-type opinion poll. Items covered the areas of minimum wage, food stamps, camp supervision, child care, medical and dental assistance, welfare assistance, and education. Options following a statement were: strongly agree, agree, undecided, disagree, and strongly disagree. Results indicated confused attitudes toward migrants. On one hand, respondents favored the minimum wage law for migrants; food stamps, if eligible; and State supervision of the migrant camps. On the other hand, these same respondents did not favor welfare assistance to qualified migrants, free medical and dental assistance, or free or inexpensive child care services for their children. A check of the responses of males and females in the sample, for the most part, showed little difference in the way each sex responded. Differences were noted on two statements: 12 of the 16 females agreed that child care should be provided while most of the males disagreed; and most of the males disagreed that Spanish should be taught to migrants in school while most of the females were undecided. (Author/NQ)

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ATTITUDES OF INDIANA TOWNSPEOPLE TOWARDS MIGRANTS

1975

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Each year, $26,000,000 worth of Indiana crops are harvested by 18,000 migrant farm workers and their families. More than 80 percent of these workers are Mexican-Americans, traveling from their homes in the lower Rio Grande Valley in Texas to seek stoop labor in Indiana.[1]

Migrant workers from other home base states including Florida, Missouri, and Arkansas join those from Texas, arriving as early as mid-May to prepare fields for planting and for early cultivation of crops.[2] The Indiana migrant season peaks in September and ends by early October.

Although poor farmworkers represent 2 percent of this nation's population, the U.S. Department of Labor, in 1972, reported that they received less that 0.009 percent of the Federal expenditures for domestic social programs and services.[3]

Apparently qualified to receive a number of welfare benefits, these benefits rarely reach them. The Office of Economic Opportunity report found that because of "mobility, residency requirements, and problems of obtaining required income certification, migrants have only limited opportunities to participate in ... Medicaid, food stamps, welfare surplus food commodities, Federal job training, and child care."[4]

The 1975 report, Indiana Migrants: Blighted Hopes, Slighted Rights, shows that this condition is also true in Indiana.

Since most of the Indiana migrant workers are concentrated in

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the central counties, it was thought that a sampling of the attitudes of resident Hoosiers towards migrants might provide some insight into this problem.

A small town in Henry County with a population of 450 persons was selected as the study site. Each year between 200 and 250 migrants make their homes temporarily in this community from May to October, contributing to the economic life of this small town.

Do townspeople view migrants as welcomed guests, necessary and vital to the economy of the community? Or do they view them as unwelcomed burdens that somehow must be endured?

In an attempt to answer these questions, a survey of community attitudes towards migrants was made in April, 1975, prior to the arrival of the migrant workers. A college student who had lived all of her life in this community collected the attitude samples.

A random sample of attitudes was obtained by selecting every third house on several of the streets in the community. The sample population consisted of 19 males and 16 females, ranging in age from 20 to 60. It was estimated by the college student that 90% of the sample had lived in the community their entire lives.

Each of the 35 persons in the sample population was given a twelve item Likert scale by the college student interviewer. Since she was known to them, it was felt that responses would be given with little or no attempt to hide their true feelings. Options following a statement were: STRONGLY AGREE, AGREE, UNDECIDED, DISAGREE, and STRONGLY DISAGREE.

The twelve items included in the scale are as follows:

1. Migrants should be covered by the Federal minimum wage laws.
2. Migrants whose income does not adequately provide should apply for welfare through the township trustee.

3. Migrants should be provided with free or inexpensive day care for their children.

4. Migrants should be given food stamps if eligible.

5. Migrants should be provided with free medical and dental assistance.

6. There should be close supervision by state authorities on housing in migrant camps.

7. Migrants should be taught in Spanish as well as English in our schools.

8. Local tax funds should be used to offer special schooling for migrants in the summer months.

9. Having migrant children as playmates is beneficial for community children because it exposes them to a different cultural group.

10. The arrival of the migrants each year gives a feeling of insecurity and fear throughout the town.

11. The migrants are happy care-free persons content with their life style

12. A large percent of the migrant field workers eventually leave the fields to make better lives for themselves.

Results of the opinion poll are shown in Table 1.

Table 1

RESULTS OF THE OPINION POLL ON
MIGRANTS BY SAMPLE OF TOWNSPEOPLE

STATEMENT	1		2		3		4		5		6		7		8		9		10		11		12	
RESPONSE	NUMBER	PERCENT	NUMBER	PERCENT	NUMBER	PERCENT	NUMBER	PERCENT	NUMBER	PERCENT	NUMBER	PERCENT	NUMBER	PERCENT	NUMBER	PERCENT	NUMBER	PERCENT	NUMBER	PERCENT	NUMBER	PERCENT	NUMBER	PERCENT
STRONGLY AGREE	6	17.1	0	0	2	5.7	6	17.1	0	0	7	20.0	2	5.7	0	0	6	17.1	2	5.7	7	20.0	0	0
AGREE	20	57.1	0	0	10	28.5	15	42.8	0	0	20	57.1	2	5.7	2	5.7	15	42.8	5	14.2	20	57.1	5	14.2
UNDECIDED	1	2.8	2	5.7	1	2.8	0	0	1	2.8	1	2.8	10	28.5	3	8.5	4	11.4	2	5.7	1	2.8	5	14.2
DISAGREE	0	0	5	14.2	7	20.0	10	28.5	29	82.8	7	20.0	19	54.2	15	42.8	0	0	20	57.1	6	17.1	20	57.1
STRONGLY DISAGREE	8	22.8	28	8.0	15	42.8	4	11.4	5	14.2	0	0	2	5.7	15	42.8	10	28.5	6	17.1	1	2.8	5	14.2

Interpretation of the results of the scale reveals a mixed pattern of attitudes. A check of the responses of males and females in the sample, for the most part, showed little difference in the way each sex responded. Differences were noted on responses to two statements. Twelve of the 16 females agreed that child care should be provided (statement three) while most of the sample disagreed. Most of the males disagreed that Spanish should be taught to migrants in school while most of the women were undecided.

Responses of the sample population seem to indicate a confused attitude towards migrants. On one hand, 74% of the sample agreed that migrants should be covered by the minimum wage law; 60% agreed that they should be given food stamps, if eligible; and 77% agreed that state authorities should supervise migrant camps. This would seem to indicate concern for the welfare of migrant workers.

On the other hand, almost 85% disagreed that migrants who qualified should be given welfare assistance; 97% disagreed that free medical and dental assistance should be provided to migrants; and almost 63% disagreed that free or inexpensive child care services should be provided for migrant children. These attitudes contrast rather sharply with those identified in the previous paragraph.

Although interpretation of seemingly opposed attitudes is not clear-cut, one might consider that the areas of minimum wage, food stamps, and camp supervision are ones perceived to be addition help in activities in which migrants are making an effort to help themselves. Child care, medical and dental assistance, and welfare assistance might be perceived as outright help in which no self effort on the part of migrants is required.

The "Protestant ethic" would appear to be strong in the sample population.

Another avenue of interpretation might be to consider the fact that minimum wage, food stamps, and camp supervision do not require direct payment from local tax monies. Welfare assistance, by comparison, does require the use of local tax money. Financing a child care program and a dental and medical assistance program may be perceived by the respondents as requiring the use of local tax money. Some support is given for this interpretation in examining the response of the sample to the utilization of local tax funds for migrant summer school. The level of disagreement is 85%.

Should migrants be taught in Spanish, as well as English? Although 60% disagreed, 30% were undecided. Federal law requires that students whose primary language is other than English, be taught in their primary language. Denial of the utilization of Spanish in order to facilitate learning whould seem to be a denial of cultural differences. Rather than recognizing linguistic ties from the non-Anglo cultural background, the expressed attitude of the townspeople in the sample seems to be one of conforming to the predominately Anglo-American core culture by learning English.

The remaining items show that most (74%) of the respondents did not feel insecure when migrants are in town and many (60%) felt that exposure of their children to migrant children as playmates was beneficial. These responses can be interpreted as expressed attitudes of acceptance of migrants. Again, these must be countered with the fact that 77% of the sample population agreed that migrants are happy, carefree persons, content with their life style. This would seem to deny that migrant workers are among the lowest paid group in society, that

the transient life presents more problems than joys, and that poverty, prejudice, discrimination, and outward rejection have any effect on migrants and their families.

Coupled with this attitude, 71% of the sample disagreed that many of the migrants eventually leave the fields, and make a better life for themselves. A surface knowledge of migrants and romanticizing of the gypsy-like life style could account for such feelings on the part of Indiana townspeople.

In summary, an analysis of the attitudes of the townspeople in this sample reveals limited acceptance of migrants and their problems. While one might expect outward rejection of these temporary residents, such is not the case. While townspeople believe that migrants who qualify should share in the benefits of food stamps and the minimum wage law, the use of local tax money to assist migrants in economic, health, or educational areas is rejected very strongly. Although townspeople did not feel insecure or threatened with migrants in town and even approved of their children socializing with the migrant children, most of the townspeople believed that migrants are happy, carefree, and content with their life style.

It would appear that social, service, religious, and educational organizations in Indiana which attempt to aid migrants in securing assistance and services to which they are legally entitled, should be aware of the possibility of limited acceptance of migrants by townspeople. Awareness of such attitudes could lead these organizations to new efforts to inform and educate townspeople concerning the realistic needs and legal rights of migrants.

Footnotes

1. Indiana Advisory Committee to the United States Commission on Civil Rights, Indiana Migrants: Blighted Hopes, Slighted Rights, March 1975, p.10

2. Ibid.

3. U.S. Department of Labor, Manpower Administration, Office of National Programs, Division Migrant Programs, Report on the Department of Farmworker Task Force, September 1973, p. 55.

4. U.S., Comptroller General, Impact of Federal Programs to Improve the Living Conditions of Migrant and Other Seasonal Farmworkers, 1973, p. 23.

Abstract

ATTITUDES OF INDIANA
TOWNSPEOPLE TOWARDS MIGRANTS

A random sample of 19 males and 16 females from a small Indiana town (population 450) reacted to a 12 item Likert - type opinion poll constructed by the author.

Results of the reactions to the opinion poll seemed to indicate confused attitudes towards migrants. On one hand, respondents favored the minimum wage law for migrants, food stamps, if eligible, and state supervision of the migrant camps. On the other hand, these same respondents did not favor welfare assistance to qualified migrants, free medical and dental assistance for them, or free or inexpensive child care services for their children.

These, as well as, other items in the opinion poll are analyzed and discussed as to implications and possible reasons for such stated positions by the townspeople.

Items in the opinion poll are included, as is a table with a statistical breakdown of responses of the sample.